

DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

news release

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

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WHOOPING CRANE POPULATION SUMMARIZED

The official endangered whooping crane population record was released today by Interior's Fish and Wildlife Service Director Lynn A. Greenwalt as the wintering flock readies for its spring migration from the Aransas National Wildlife Refuge in south Texas to the Northwest Territories of Canada.

This migratory bird, now a symbol of endangered species, has gained a toehold on survival since the late thirties and early forties when its numbers were less than two dozen.

The count of whoopers migrating to Aransas in the fall of 1973 was 49 birds--47 adults and two young. One of the young apparently died early in the winter from unknown causes. No remains have been found.

Whooping cranes have never been numerous. The best scientific estimate is that 1,000 to 2,000 of the birds existed at their peak.

Since the late 1930's close attention has been paid to these magnificent birds when a wintering ground refuge was established for them in the south Texas gulf coastal area at Aransas. Their population has risen and fallen in cycles. Scientists have noted a certain rhythm over the past four decades that suggests population declines at about 11 or 12 year intervals. This can be seen in the early years of the forties, fifties, sixties, and seventies. The best explanation for this seeming pattern is a combination of weather and habitat conditions on the whooping crane nesting grounds in Canada during summer months.

Further, when whoopers reach Canada only the mature, paired birds go to the Great Slave Lake area of Wood Buffalo Park where nests are established. The immature young summer elsewhere in an as-yet-unlocated area of Canada. The losses that occur seem to have been suffered by these immature birds.

As the record below indicates, whooping cranes have been seen wintering in Mexico. The non-migratory flock of whooping cranes that lived in Louisiana during the 1930's and 1940's was particularly hard hit by a 1940 hurricane. One of the survivors of that storm was picked up and moved to the Audubon Park Zoo in New Orleans, and in 1948 the lone survivor of the flock was picked up and moved to the Aransas National Wildlife Refuge. It subsequently died a natural death.

(OVER)

WHOOPING CRANE POPULATION
(Migratory Flock--Birds Reaching Wintering Grounds)

<u>Year</u>	<u>Adult Plumage</u>	<u>Young of Year</u>	<u>Total</u>
1938	14	4	18
1939	15	7	22
1940	21	5	26
1941	13	2	15
1942	15	4	19
1943	16	5	21
1944	15	3	18
1945*	14	3	17
1946	22	3	25
1947	25	6	31
1948	27	3	30
1949	30	4	34
1950	26	5	31
1951	20	5	25
1952	19	2	21
1953	21	3	24
1954	21	0	21
1955	20	8	28
1956	22	2	24
1957	22	4	26
1958	23	9	32
1959	31	2	33
1960	30	6	36
1961	34	5	39
1962	32	0	32
1963**	28	7	35
1964	32	10	42
1965	36	8	44
1966	38	5	43
1967	39	9	48
1968	44	6	50
1969	48	8	56
1970	51	6	57
1971	54	5	59
1972	46	5	51
1973	47	2	49

* 1945 count of migrant flock on Aransas and environs was 14 and 3, but as 22 whoopers in adult plumage returned to the refuge in the fall of 1946, it is evident some birds were not counted.

** 1963 count includes two whooping cranes (presumed in adult plumage) from the Tampico, Mexico, area, reported by Game Management Agents Frazier and Hogue.

NOTE: Limitations on airplane use during the late 1930's and early 1940's made censusing difficult and increased the potential for incomplete counts. In addition to the above population chart, a non-migratory whooping crane flock in Louisiana totaled as follows: 1938/11, 1939/13, 1940/6, 1941/6, 1942/5, 1943/4, 1944/3, 1945/2, 1946/2, 1947/1, 1948/1.